

Vietnamese Spouses' Cultural and Social Identity in Taiwan

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Graduate School of Asia Pacific Studies
Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in Asia Pacific Studies

August 29, 2014
Beppu City, Japan

Abstract

Whilst a considerable number of studies in relation to Vietnamese female spouses in Taiwan have tried to explore many crucial issues such as life adjustment, knowledge empowerment, the life of new generations, marriage motives, post-marital life, and the process of matching making and facilitate understanding of this particular ethnic group, nonetheless few have focused on their cultural and social identities ,having become a core part to secure themselves when settling down in Taiwan and commencing a new life on the one hand, and constructing their social networks and enhancing their social status on the other hand. Additionally, unlike this research analyzed both qualitative data gained from interviews and quantitative data gained from questionnaires, most of research would only look into this phenomenon by way of either qualitative way or quantitative way. Thus, using two data collection methods provides not only an opportunity to interact qualitatively with Vietnamese spouses but also gain a more representative data set providing more reliable research results. Furthermore, this dissertation research fills a gap in the previous literature on the experiences of these women in Taiwan in terms of how their cultural identity and social identity affect the quality of their lives. The aim of this dissertation research was to enrich the understanding of Vietnamese female spouses in Taiwan from the perspectives of cultural identity and social identity.

Seven Vietnamese wives in Taiwan were interviewed. The interviews were conducted and recorded in Chinese and then translated into English. Reoccurring themes or ideas from the interviews were categorized as follows: personal abilities and traits, remittances and ethnic identity, filial piety as the eldest daughter and daughter-in-law, holding incense, male heir in a Taiwanese family, dual and dynamic personal identity—a process of acculturation, culture diffusion: food and karaoke, the maintenance or management of transnational marriage, and the description of social exchange. Through above-mentioned findings, the process of transformation regarding cultural identity and social identity of Vietnamese spouses is to be better perceived and located behind this unique phenomenon—transnational marriage in Taiwan.

In addition, 200 Vietnamese wives in Taiwan completed a questionnaire that 99% completed in Vietnamese and 1% in Chinese. The questionnaire included 25 items categorized into four dimensions of cultural identity: “cultural belonging,” “self-identity,” “cultural devotion,” and “cultural integration.” The analysis of the quantitative questionnaire data showed that among the four dimensions of cultural identity, cultural integration received a higher mean score than cultural devotion and cultural belonging, while self-identity received the lowest mean score. Therefore, it is assumed that most of Vietnamese respondents think adapting themselves to Taiwan’s culture or customs cannot be emphasized too much while living in Taiwan, being concomitant of retaining their original culture or customs.

The research findings suggest that Vietnamese female spouses have the ability to take

advantage of their surroundings by involvement in cultural capital activities such as Vietnamese cooking and language related skills. Moreover, these wives further enhance their cultural capital by spending time developing skills in local Taiwanese languages and customs. These Vietnamese spouses have learned how to flexibly utilize their cultural and social capital while interacting with Taiwanese locals, other Vietnamese spouses, and Vietnamese migrant workers inside the family premises or in public places like eateries or factories. Likewise, by participating in more activities held by the government or non-governmental organizations, they have gradually enhanced empowerment and increased their own social status. The findings of this dissertation research can play a crucial role in aiding transnational couples in Taiwan by providing the Taiwanese government suggestions for improving their quality of life.